

# ITEMS and Information

April 2000 (888) 744-GRAD www.grad.usda.gov

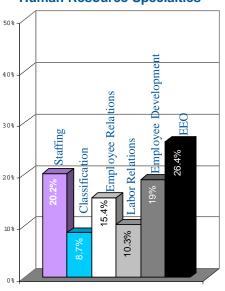
A RISE: The number of students enrolled in the Graduate School's HR courses reached 3,133 in



### **SNAPSHOT**

EEO jump: The largest human resource specialty in the federal government concerns equal employment opportunity.

#### **Human Resource Specialties\***



Source: Office of Personnel Management's study "An Occupation in Transition," completed January 2000. \*1998 breakdown of 9,941 full-time HR specialists

## **COVER STORY**

## **HR Specialists Face Challenge**

What happens when you lose institutional memory? The Office of Personnel Management took up that question and other issues

facing human resource personnel in the federal government in an extensive study completed in January.

"We wanted to capture major changes after downsizing," says Leigh Giles-Brown, a program analyst with the Office of Merit Systems Oversight

and Effectiveness at OPM, who coauthored the study. "Some findings were a surprise, especially the loss of technical expertise."

The most important issues to surface:

- ▶ National demographic changes, such as an aging workforce and eligibility, need to be addressed.
- ► HR requires more flexibility now.
- ► Four new main roles are emerging: business partner (linking HR to strategic plans), leader, technical HR expert and change agent.

OPM found that the government needs more technical experts and HR specialists who know the businesspartner role.

The Graduate School's sevenmember Human Resources Advisory Board, made up of a cross section of representatives from federal agencies and other experts, addressed the OPM study in March.

"The meeting was very lively with an energetic discussion of the skill



liaison. "In years past, new personnel specialists could learn from others. Now [they] have fewer mentors."

Since new HR specialists may not know where to look for answers to their questions, the board considered technological tools to help personnelists research. One possibility is to pull together information on existing job aids. Another would be to develop new aids such as electronic performance support systems that would help find quick and reliable answers to questions. A new technical resource site may also be in the offing.

For information about HR courses, call (888) 744-GRAD.



## **INQUIRY**

As vice president for strategic planning at the U.S. Postal Service, Robert Reisner has been in a unique position to see the unprecedented strategic challenges posed by a new technological age.

With the advent of the Internet, communications are becoming increasingly electronic. USPS is working to create new services in electronic commerce, the Internet,

interactive services, distributed printing and smart cards.

The numbers are daunting. According to Microsoft, e-commerce in the United States generated \$711.4 billion in revenues in 1999 and continues to increase rapidly. At the same time, traditional services offered by USPS are growing. USPS handled 750 million cards, letters and packages on its busiest day last December. The organization's next five-year plan due to Congress in September will have to set a course to accommodate these demands.

Reisner joined the Graduate School's General Administration Board in May. We talked to him about strategic planning in government.

On differences in strategic planning in the public and **private sectors**: What makes working in the public sector interesting is the breadth of the mission of the public agencies. It is more difficult to define clear goals and to balance priorities in the public sector. In the private sector it is easier to set objectives to balance shareholders interests and customer satisfaction.

On using private sector strategies: The big story of the Postal Service in the '90s was one of performance improvement, using management tools derived from the quality movement – not to change the organization, but to give management a focus and a basis for continuous performance improvement. The strategic challenge is seeing that incremental performance improvement will not be enough in the future. We need to apply new strategy tools in new ways.

On how the information age will affect the Postal **Service**: The traditional concept of a mail monopoly has been eroded dramatically by the substitution of electronic products and by dynamic changes in the marketplace. Traditional letter mail is being transformed by electronics, and e-mail is substituting for letter mail. But even more importantly, transaction mail – paying and sending out bills—will be changed in the future. New shipping services and types of delivery are being created in the Internet economy. There will be a whole new form of distribution of products and services in the future. On changing the Postal Service's culture to **results-oriented thinking**: The strategic challenge may not have been as difficult as providing incentives for action. The Postal Service is service-oriented. Yet it is difficult to sustain day-to-day performance improvement, to galvanize action and provide incentives. We created an economic value-added incentive program in which bonuses are paid

> each year. We still need to find new ways to provide incentives. Charismatic leadership gets you part of the way. Recognition is important. But moving to the next step of transformation is difficult.

On the most challenging milestone **ahead**: There is an emerging threat to the economic model on which the Postal Service has rested. Each year there has been more mail. It is just astonishing. It's boxcars; it's trainloads. But this year for the first time, we are seeing a slowing of growth. And our costs are rising faster than our growth. If our growth flattens completely, then this spring we will have may mean legislative reform or other

kinds of dramatic action to try and open up the system and continue to provide service in spite of rising costs.

to confront our ability to manage. That

On attracting people on the cutting edge of the **technology**: It's a very serious problem. We've lost people who are very important leaders of new product development because there are opportunities in the private sector. We need to see this as a strength of the market, but it's a very difficult problem in terms of recruiting. It also means that we will have to turn to new kinds of private sector relationships – incentive contracting and new kinds of venture partnerships to provide services if we cannot grow from within.

On what should be emphasized in strategic planning **courses**: There are three parts to serious public sector strategic planning. One has to do with performance improvement, setting goals and applying management tools to achieve agency results. That track is often seen separately from the second, the budget track, especially capital investment, where the government needs to make multi-year investments to develop capital and infrastructure. The third track is the policy track. These three tracks are distinct elements of strategy and management in the federal government that need to be connected to make them effective. The law – the Results Act – provides that framework. The challenge of the next decade is for all of us to make these tools work well.

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Robert Reisner

# **TRAINING**

## From The Director



Today the federal government faces tremendous workforce challenges. Solutions will materialize only by directly confronting human resource issues now.

Consider the scope of the problem as reported in the March issue of Government Executive:

- ➤ 30 percent of federal employees will be able to retire by 2004.
- ▶ 19 percent could opt for early retirement in four years.
- ➤ 60 percent of Senior Executive Service professionals will be eligible to retire in five years.
- ➤ 21 percent of SESers could choose early retirement in that period.

Top those numbers with a tight labor market and you have an impending human capital crisis. To forestall trouble, agencies need to increasingly emphasize training, competitive recruiting and leadership development.

The Graduate School offers more than 60 courses in human resources management that are geared to the federal workforce. Five new courses, including *Staffing for Supervisors and Managers*, have been added to the curriculum, and the nationwide curriculum team continues to focus on improvements.

As the government's trainer, we hope to help you take proactive steps for your agency's future.

Daily X. Holson

## **New Course for HR Professionals**

Human resources personnel in the federal government may see a learning curve with the new competency-based approach to hiring adopted by the Office of Personnel Management. To help, the Graduate School will launch a new nationwide course, *Competency-Based Examining*, in May 2001.

"We will need to increase our expertise in the area of competencies

through training and hands-on experience to ensure successful implementation," says Donna Gregory, OPM's director of nationwide examining policy, noting that OPM will post best practices and case studies on their home page and continue to offer briefings and workshops.



The use of empirical data to determine the general and technical competencies needed for a job will usurp narrow indicators such as years of experience and credit hours that qualification standards rely on. This new approach emphasizes measurable, observable patterns of behavior—competencies—like knowledge, skills and abilities. For more information about this course, call John Green at (404) 730-9653.

# **Symposium Success**

In March, the Graduate School took part in the American Society of Military Comptrollers' D.C. Chapter Symposium. With more than 360 Department of Defense employees attending – including some senior officials – the Graduate School presented an overview of the Enhanced Defense Financial Management Training course developed for ASMC. Three instructors weighed in with one-hour synopses of course modules.

"The Graduate School will deliver 68 sessions of the ASMC course to about 2000 defense personnel this year," says Frank Bauer, the Graduate School's Northeast Training Center director. Sessions will be conducted nationwide and in Japan, Korea, England and Germany.

## **New Director for International Institute**

E arl Mathers has joined the Graduate School. He comes from Development Associates in Arlington, Va., where—as head of the Democracy and Governance division—he designed, organized and conducted international training activities. He has also served as an American advisor to Russia.

The Graduate School's international arm provides training and technical assistance to foreign government officials and U.S. government employees and citizens who have international responsibilities or work in multicultural settings.



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## WHAT'S NEW

#### **Just Published:**

Robert Walsh, a program manager for the National Capital Training Center, made the pages of Training & Development in February. His article on brainfriendly communication discussed cognitive processing – how to "present information in ways the brain likes to deal with."

**Robert Brown,** a former Graduate School senior associate, published a book review on "The Sum of the Differences," in the winter issue of The Public Manager.

A First: Credits earned at the Graduate School, USDA can now be transferred to Georgetown University under an articulation agreement. When students enroll for a certificate of collegiate studies offered by the Graduate School's Evening Programs, they can apply simultaneously to Georgetown's School of Summer and Continuing Education. Credits earned in courses in English, literature, math, statistics, foreign languages, social science and science with a B or above can then be used toward Georgetown's bachelor of arts in liberal studies.

**Faculty Day**: The annual Faculty Development Conference will be held on June 24 from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Capital Gallery in Washington, D.C. This year's theme is "Celebrating Your Graduate School Contribution: The Key to Success." The conference will feature workshops, keynote speaker and vendors. Program tracks include classroom management and the use of technology. Call (202) 314-3650 for more information.

**Civil Servants Recognized:** May marks the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Public Service Recognition Week, which honors federal, state and local government employees. From May 1 to 7, organizers hold parades, community clean-up dates and fund-raising events nationwide.

